
1 Introduction

Beyond Experiences that Make a Difference

Despite the considerable growth in tourism and its many achievements, it has become clear that it has not always been able simultaneously to meet the needs of communities and those who visit them. Evidence that tourism often privileges visitors' needs over host communities is well documented in the literature (Torres & Momset, 2005; Jamal *et al.*, 2006; Meyer, 2007). In part, this has been attributed to a social, economic and political order that places profits ahead of people, which has dominated the globe and worsened over the past decade. The dominance of neoliberal politics, both generally and within tourism, continues to broaden the gap between wealthy and poor nations and, more broadly, between the Global North and Global South (Steinbrink, 2012). In response to this continued inequity, alternative ways of tourism development are being championed.

In addition to the obvious focus on volunteer tourism, a number of other forms of tourism will be introduced and discussed in this chapter (and throughout the book) as well, including mass tourism, sustainable tourism, ecotourism, alternative tourism and pro-poor tourism (PPT). Mass tourism refers to the mainstream, well developed and highly commodified form of tourism most commonly experienced, which involves an exchange of discretionary income for an experience that takes place away from the normal sphere of life. Sustainable tourism has received a great deal of attention (and an equal amount of controversy) and refers to tourism that is developed in a way that focuses on the long-term, economic, socio-cultural and environmental viability of a community. Ecotourism is often used interchangeably with sustainable tourism, but in fact has a stronger focus on the environmental protection of a destination. Alternative tourism emerged in the 1990s as a more radical form of sustainable tourism (Pearce, 1992). Alternative tourism sought to challenge increasingly

commodified mass tourism and at the very least sidestep, but ideally disrupt, the consumptive practices that underpinned it. Finally, PPT is an approach to the industry that aims to provide opportunities for the poor. Over the past decade, volunteer tourism can trace its roots in alternative and ecotourism, but now can be found in virtually every sector and type of tourism, including mass tourism.

As a result of the growth of volunteer tourism, this book examines how volunteer tourism acts as an alternative form of tourism while struggling with its own commodification. The rise of commodified and packaged forms of volunteer tourism raises important questions about whether volunteer tourism really remains 'alternative'. However, before addressing such critical considerations, we first turn to a discussion of the history and pedigree of volunteer tourism and the alternative 'turn' that we claim gave rise to it.

Historical Foundations of Alternative Tourism

Historically, the prohibitive costs, transport difficulties and perceived dangers prevented many from experiencing other countries and cultures outside of their own. From the beginning of recorded history to as late as the 18th century, leisure travel was largely the province of the privileged and even then, something that was not particularly easy. In the Middle Ages for example, a time of mass Christian pilgrimages, 'travel was still generally considered to be a dangerous and uncomfortable experience that was best avoided if at all possible' (Weaver & Opperman, 2000: 61).

It was the phenomenon of the 'Grand Tour', which became popular in the 16th century, that best represents the initial developments of international tourism (Towner, 1985). Aristocratic young men from 'the United Kingdom and other parts of Europe undertook extended trips to continental Europe for educational and cultural purposes' (Weaver & Opperman, 2000: 61). High social value was placed on these expeditions; however, it was here that travel motives began to shift: travelling for religious pilgrimage, education and social status slowly gave way to travelling for pleasure and sightseeing. The industrial revolution saw a growing need for recreation opportunities and, subsequently, the transport systems to allow them to occur (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2012). Following the introduction of improvements in transport such as railroads, sealed roads and even ocean liners, the nature of travel began to change rapidly. Notably, the widespread application of air travel for leisure purposes and the growing economies of scale meant that travel soon became a commodity to be sold to a growing number of potential tourists. As Hall (1995: 38) observes:

Mass tourism is generally acknowledged to have commenced on 5 July 1841, when the first conducted excursion train of Thomas Cook left Leicester station in northern Britain. Since that time tourism has developed from the almost exclusive domain of the aristocracy to an experience that is enjoyed by tens of millions worldwide.

As mass tourism advanced into the 19th century, it became more and more insulated from the real world and treated as an escape to extraordinary places,

offering an experience that had little to do with the reality surrounding it (Larsen, 2008). In opposition to its origins, where travellers sought the unknown, mass tourism was fast becoming a home away from home where participants no longer had to expose themselves to the dangers of having to meet and associate with the host community, as they were now able to 'gaze' (Urry, 2002) from the safety and comfort of coaches, trains and hotel rooms without self-immersion into the cultural milieu surrounding them. Group sizes and frequency of excursions increased, thus giving literal weight to the term 'mass tourism'.

Tourism has become the world's largest industry. The 10-year annualized growth (2007–2016) forecast is 4.2% per annum. The number of international arrivals shows an evolution from a mere 25 million in 1950 to an estimated 980 million in 2011, corresponding to an average annual growth rate of 4.4%, even in the current economic environment (UNWTO, 2012). Tourism is directly responsible for 5% of the world's GDP, 6% of total exports, and employs one out of every 12 people in advanced and emerging economies alike (UNWTO, 2012).

In accounting for tourism as a global phenomenon, much of the initial sociological work was concerned with the individual tourist and the part that vacations play in establishing identity and a sense of self. This self was predominantly posited as a universal and tourism, like leisure, was seen in an opposing relationship with the 'workaday world'. Cohen and Taylor (1976), for example, drew on Goffman's (1974) concern with the presentation of self in everyday life, to argue that holidays are culturally sanctioned escape routes for Western travellers. One of the problems for the modern traveller, in this view, is to establish an identity and a sense of personal individuality in the face of the morally void forces of a technological world. Holidays provide a free area, a mental and physical escape from the immediacy of the multiplicity of impinging pressures in technological society. Thus, holidays provide scope for the nurture and cultivation of human identity; as Cohen and Taylor (1976) argue, overseas holidays are structurally similar to leisure because one of their chief purposes is identity (re)establishment and the cultivation of one's self-consciousness. The tourist, they claim, uses all aspects of the holiday for the manipulation of well-being.

However, in the tourist literature, these arguments became diverted into a debate about the authenticity or otherwise of this experience (e.g. MacCannell, 1976; Cohen, 1987), serving to focus attention on the attractions of the tourist destination. Such a shift objectified the destination as place – a specific geographical site was presented to the tourist for their gaze (Urry, 2002). Thus the manner of presentation became all important and its authenticity or otherwise the focus of analysis: 'It will also be suggested that objects of the tourist gaze can be effectively classified in terms of three key dichotomies, of which the romantic/collective is one (others are authentic/inauthentic and historical/modern)', says Urry (2002: 75). The tourists themselves became synonymous with the Baudelarian flaneur (French for 'gazer': 'the strolling flaneur was a forerunner of the 20th century tourist') (Urry, 2002: 127). This flaneur was generally perceived as escaping from the workaday world for an 'ephemeral', 'fugitive' and 'contingent' leisure experience (e.g. Rojek, 1993: 216).

Similarly to the way in which this type of 'flânerie' (Urry, 2002: 135) characterized tourism of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, alternative tourism has characterized the latter part of the 20th century. Tourists began searching for new and exciting forms of travel in defiance of the mass-produced tourism product borne out of the industrial revolution and, prior to that, the need for social standing (Weaver & Opperman, 2000; Hall, 2007). Backpacking, adventure tourism and ecotourism are some of the types of alternative tourism that emerged during this time and have since confirmed, via their popularity, their place as targeted market segments. The convergence of these forms of tourism, their appeal to young travellers and the advent of the internet created an alternative tourism perfect storm. Niche markets were developed that allowed the tourist to choose the holiday they felt best suited their needs and wants, while at the same time maintaining an appropriate level of social status among their peers.

Within the literature, the provision of alternative tourism is fundamentally aligned to social and environmental sustainability. Factors such as impacts upon the cultural traditions of the host community (the community associated with the destination area), biodiversity and environmental degradation dominate such literature in the late 1990s and early 21st century (e.g. World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987; Cronin, 1990; Ecologically Sustainable Development Working Groups, 1991; Richards & Hall, 2000; Sofield, 2003; Weaver, 2006).

The question of sustainability – and sustainable development by implication – in relation to alternative forms of tourism experiences has become central in the analysis and provision of these types of experiences. The *World Conservation Strategy* initially posited sustainability as an underlying premise for a large number of projects based in developing countries, and *Our Common Future* (widely known as the Brundtland Report) attempted to give it an operational context (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987; De la Court, 1990; Farrell & Runyan, 1991; Hare, 1991), which enabled agencies to engender it into their operating philosophies. For the past decade, global sustainable development has been promoted by the 2000 United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals of which tourism was identified as an important contributing industry (Ruhanen *et al.*, 2007).

Alternative tourism has developed into a significant area of tourism experience research (Holden, 1984; Cohen, 1987; Vir Singh *et al.*, 1989; Pleumarom, 1990; Weiler & Hall, 1992; Smith & Eadington, 1997; Conway & Timms, 2010; Isaac, 2010; Pegg *et al.*, 2012). However, it is important to note that a number of authors (R.W. Butler, 1990; Cohen, 1995; Wheeler, 2003; Weaver, 2011) have incorporated alternative tourism into the analysis of 'mass tourism', thus subordinating it to mainstream tourism research. Questions thus arise as to the feasibility of alternative tourism being differentiated as a separate construct or different paradigm. This has been a problem historically within new and emergent areas of research, as explained in the case of feminist research by Stanley and Wise (1984). Later in this book we explore whether volunteer tourism, like other forms of alternative tourism, is showing signs of being co-opted into the dominant capitalist paradigm of mass tourism that

celebrates the tourist as consumer rather than as co-producer of sustainable living. However, before such a critique can be fully considered, it is first necessary to look at the manifestation of volunteer tourism as it has arisen as part of the alternative tourism movement.

Volunteer Tourism as the Ultimate Alternative Tourism?

When scholars first turned their attention to early volunteer tourism in the late 1990s, it was not well understood. Necessarily, this early scholarship, including Wearing's (2001) and McGehee's (2002) work, was narrowly focussed upon the relatively few existing volunteer tourism projects in operation at that time. In short, early work positioned volunteer tourism as a possibility for the future, and the future is now. Alternative forms of tourism such as volunteer tourism have come of age over the past decade. Growing interest in volunteer tourism has led to clearer definitions and a greater differentiation from other forms of tourism and volunteering. In *Volunteer Tourism: Experiences That Make a Difference*, the following definition was offered:

. . . 'volunteer tourism' applies to those tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve the aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments, or research into aspects of society or environment.

(Wearing, 2001: 1)

This definition has provided a useful mechanism for clarifying and classifying a particular type of tourism. However, it has its limits. Ambiguities around what constitutes volunteerism and tourism challenge discrete definitional boundaries (Benson, 2011). Moreover, such a definition does not question the limits of volunteer tourism, and how it manifests in a wide range of contexts. Volunteer tourism (now also sometime termed 'voluntourism' and/or volunteer vacations), although still a fledgling concept and practice, has moved from the periphery closer to the centre of tourism research. In part, this is because the last 10 years have seen a steady increase in interest and practice with a corresponding rise in the scholarship of volunteer tourism.

This book considers new examples of volunteer tourist operations, including organizations such as Youth Challenge International (YCI, 2008, 2010), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Earthwatch, Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA), British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) and Mobility International USA (MIUSA), to name just a few. Lesser known examples include Antipodeans, Blue Ventures and Atalaya Peru.

These operations and the projects they undertake vary in location, size, participant characteristics and numbers, and organizational purpose. The common element in these operations, however, is that the participants can largely be viewed as volunteer tourists. That is, they are seeking a tourist experience that is mutually beneficial, that will contribute not only to their personal

development, but also positively and directly to the social, natural and/or economic environments in which they participate. The philosophy of Explorations in Travel (EIT, 2008), a US-based volunteer work-placement firm, provides a good insight:

Travelling is a way to discover new things about ourselves and learn to see ourselves more clearly. Volunteering abroad is a way to spend time within another culture, to become part of new community, to experience life from a different perspective . . . Every community needs people willing to volunteer their time, energy and money to projects that will improve the living conditions for its inhabitants. No one needs to travel around the world to find a good and worthy cause to dedicate their efforts to. Volunteering should be something we do as a regular part of our lives, not just when we can take a month or two off, or when we have extra money to spend on travel. Your actions are your voice in the world, saying loudly and clearly what you think is important, what you believe to be right, what you support.

(EIT, 2008: X)

Furthermore, the position of the BTCV also emphasizes this point in an environmental conservation context:

Voluntary and community action can support site and species surveys, practical conservation projects, and longer term care and management. In the course of giving their time, energy, and experience to improving biodiversity, people can gain social and economic benefits including understanding, knowledge and skills. All of this can then further enhance their voluntary commitment.

(BTCV, 2000: 1)

Volunteer tourism can take place in locations varying from densely populated urban settings to rainforests and conservation areas. Popular locations include countries in Africa, Asia, Central and South America. Activities can vary across many areas, such as scientific research (wildlife, land and water), conservation projects, medical assistance, economic and social development (including agriculture, construction and education), and cultural restoration. Indeed, volunteers can find themselves anywhere, working on a multitude of projects, including assisting with mass eye surgery operations, tree planting, conducting a health campaign, teaching English, improving village sanitation, constructing a rainforest reserve, or assisting physicians and nurses with a mobile clinic. There is generally the opportunity for volunteers to take part in local activities and interact further with the community. Hence the volunteer tourist contribution is bilateral, in that the most important development that may occur in the volunteer tourist experience is that of a personal nature, that of a greater awareness of self:

When volunteers come back they feel empowered, knowing they have been able to make a difference . . . You come home feeling you don't have limits. You feel a lot more confident in your ideas and beliefs and that you can contribute to society.

(Hill, 2001: 28)

While multidisciplinary in approach, and drawing heavily on broader tourism literature, a largely sociological perspective has been taken in this book. The Symbolic Interactionist turn in sociology is of particular value when considering how individuals construct the meaning of their experience as volunteer tourists. As part of the volunteer tourism experience, interactions occur and the self is enlarged or expanded, challenged, renewed or reinforced (Wearing & Deane, 2003). As such, the experience becomes an ongoing process, which extends far beyond the actual tourist visit. Rojek (1993: 114) claims 'travel, it was thought, led to the accumulation of experience and wisdom. One began with nothing, but through guidance, diligence and commonsense one gained knowledge and achieved self-realisation.' Furthering this, volunteer tourism provides an opportunity for some individuals to engage in an altruistic attempt to explore 'self'. It has been built around the belief that by living in and learning about other people and cultures, in an environment of mutual benefit and cooperation, one is able to engage in a transformation and the development of self.

Still, the broader tourism literature suggests that holidays do not usually have a tremendous impact on the way in which an individual sees him- or herself (Kottler, 1997: 103). It has been contended that holidays serve as an escape from the constraints and stresses of everyday life (Burkart & Medlik, 1974: 56; Cohen & Taylor, 1976; MacCannell, 1976; Rojek, 1995; Urry, 2002), or perhaps as a reward for hard work, but do not ultimately alter a person's everyday life in terms of the way they think, feel or act. The traditional tourism literature suggests that while individuals may have enjoyed themselves, it is not long before that holiday is a memory in the day-to-day life to which they inevitably return. This book seeks to explore a different approach: taking volunteer tourism and investigating the more significant impacts it can have on the individual and on their lifestyle while also examining the same for the host community.

While much has been written in relation to the motivations of tourists when engaging in tourism,¹ little research has been presented concerning the impact that leisure experiences such as volunteer tourism may have on the development of self through travel, and how one changes as a result (McGehee, 2002). The focus of the research on experience is contextualized within a framework stemming from the literature on tourism and leisure experiences. The experiential focus allows for the analysis of the volunteer tourism experience as a participative process involving direct interaction with the natural environment/local community within a specific social situation, contextualized by the differential elements of ecotourism, volunteering and serious leisure. This provides the initial basis for the exploration of alternative tourist experiences.

Selves in the Tourism Experience

To date, sociologies of tourism have developed two major themes concerning the self of the traveller. On the one hand, there has been an emphasis on tourism as a means of escape from the everyday, even if such escape is temporary.

On the other, travel has been constructed as a means of self-development, a way to broaden the mind, experience new and different cultures, environments and to come away in some way enriched. Both involve the self of the tourist. One adopts a pessimistic view, suggesting that there is no escape (Cohen & Taylor, 1992; Rojek, 1993) and the other moves to an optimistic outlook in which everyone will benefit from the tourist experience (Pearce & Caltabiano, 1983; Brown, 1992; Wearing *et al.*, 2008); others, such as MacCannell (1992), attempt to balance the two views.

MacCannell, for example, sees the touristic movement of peoples both to and from the Western world as an opportunity to form hybrid cultures, a precondition for inventing and creating subjectivities that resist cultural constraints. He claims that the neo-nomads of tourism in the postmodern era cross cultural boundaries not as invaders, but as imaginative travellers who benefit from displaced self-understanding and the freedom to go beyond the limits that frontiers present. The 'true heroes' of tourism, he claims, are those who know that 'their future will be made of dialogue with their fellow travellers and those they meet along the way' (1992: 4). On the other hand, he debunks the traveller who seeks escape through tourism while demanding the comforts of home, at an exaggerated and luxurious level. 'This', he says, 'is an overturned nomadic consciousness in which the ultimate goal of travel is to set up sedentary house-keeping in the entire world, to displace the local peoples, or at least to subordinate them in the enterprise, to make them the "household" staff of global capitalists' (MacCannell, 1992: 5). This form of ingesting the 'other' into the self – and subsequently eliminating it – is termed contemporary cannibalism: where the tourist consumes and destroys the culture of the host peoples in developing countries. Far from enlarging the self, he sees this form of tourism as supplying the energy for 'autoeroticism, narcissism, economic conservatism, egoism, and absolute group unity or fascism' (1992: 66). The tourist self, in this view, remains rigid or static and turned in on her/himself – shrinking, rather than expanding, or, in Craik's terms (1998), closing down psychic space where the self of the host person is devalued and diminished.

This book seeks to pursue another direction. Building on Kelly's (1996: 45) work on leisure, where he proclaims that 'this relative freedom makes possible the investment of self that leads to the fullest development of ourselves, the richest expression of who we want to become, and the deepest experience of fulfilment', the volunteer tourist seeks to discover the type of life experiences that best suits their needs. In undertaking this, they launch themselves into a journey of personal discovery. The volunteer tourist experience offers an opportunity to examine the potential of travel to change self, in the belief that these experiences would be of a more permanent nature than the average guided, packaged holiday that lasts 2 or 3 weeks (Kottler, 1997: 103). Craik and Cohen have given mention to the phrase 'modern day pilgrims', which propounds the idea that during the process of searching for something else, one may be better able to identify with self. The reasons for this could relate to the fact that as a result of travelling for a longer period of time, people come out of holiday mode and begin to accept things as being normal and respond accordingly (Hansel, 1993: 97). As the volunteer tourist learns and interacts

more with the people and the culture of the place in which he or she is living, the surrounding environment becomes more familiar and so they naturally absorb, integrate and adopt elements of that environment. Being able to accept and deal with one's environment is an important element in the development of self and it can be through volunteer tourism experiences that an individual must learn to rely on him or herself.

Seeking out the new and unfamiliar, and going beyond our daily concept of self is an essential step in the development of self. Such 'rites of passage' (Withey, 1997: 3) see that each individual is tested through arduous, and sometimes painful, ordeals (Craik, 1986: 24). Tourism can be considered an excellent example of such a test, as many situations encountered whilst embarking on touristic activities can be fraught with problems – problems often borne out of ignorance for one's surroundings (Montuori & Fahim, 2004). However, a number of tourists 'actually pay to be put in uncomfortable and dangerous situations' (Craik, 1986: 25) so they can feel a sense of achievement and reward once it is over.

Despite such suggestions, volunteer tourist experiences do not necessarily have to be dangerous in order to be beneficial. Darby (1994) and Wearing (1998) both suggest that an examination of travel experiences such as volunteer tourism endured by people during the stage of late adolescence can provide a clearer understanding of how an individual goes about developing their sense of self. A common element of late adolescence seems to be that each person needs to feel independent and be able to handle any difficulties that they encounter without the aid of others. As Darby (1994: 131) has suggested in relation to YCI volunteer tourist participants: 'breaking away from previous social groups and perceptions . . . gave the participants a chance to review their self; the relation to other people; and their goals and aspirations for the future'. Therefore, it may be argued that separation from 'the familiar' can provide an excellent opportunity for an individual to seek new challenges and expand or reconfirm their identity.

Evidence suggests that a high percentage of participants are between the ages of 18 and 25 (Lyons & Wearing, 2008a; Andereck *et al.*, 2012). This is an important consideration, as this is a period when young adults are solidifying their identities and beliefs. The experience of being away from their familiar culture as a volunteer tourist is imperative in the sense that one is able to begin focusing on what they, as an individual, desire in their lives independent of their peers and parents or other reference groups (Hattie, 1992: 18). Hewitt (1979: 74) maintains that each person is assigned a character both by others and by themselves (whereby they are expected to act in a particular way in all circumstances). However, one may feel trapped or stifled by the boundaries of this character and force them to seek out a new environment. Iso-Ahola *et al.* (1994: 53) makes a valid point:

Given the essence of perceived freedom to leisure and the positive relationship between perceived freedom and perceived control, much of leisure has to do with exercise of personal control over one's behaviour and environment . . . leisure develops self-determination personality and thereby helps buffer against stressful life events.

This freedom and resulting self-determination (Iso-Ahola, 1994: 53) may have the effect of providing an individual with the opportunity to develop their sense of self. Through being largely in control, not feeling pressured to act in any specific manner, taking 'time out' from normal daily life and adopting different roles, volunteer tourists may become more aware of what they are seeking and be better equipped to deal with the challenges they face when they return home (Kottler, 1997: 29).

These studies reinforce the belief that tourism does, in fact, improve the mind and overall character of its participants. Tourism, as it is known today, is thought to include certain elements of pilgrimage (Mustonen, 2005; Devereux & Carnegie, 2006). This implies that through the travel experience, a person can hope to discover things about the world around them and their particular place within it. Through the self-testing element of tourism, people gain knowledge and confidence about themselves, their abilities/limitations (Darby, 1994) and possibly an insight into the direction that they feel their lives should take.

Analyses of tourist destinations as image in tourist advertising and tourist research assumes that each individual's experience of the tourist destination will be similar (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Gartner, 1993; Cohen, 1995; Bramwell & Rawding, 1996; Palou Rubio, 2006; van Gorp & Bénéker, 2007). There is, however, a significant body of research that indicates that such a conceptualization is, in fact, counterproductive (Rowe & Stevenson, 1994; Dann, 1995). Thus, this book seeks to explore the possibility of a more useful conceptualization of the tourist: that is, as someone who is influenced by the subjective meanings impressed upon them, constructed in interaction with the space and people that form the destination site. It is the experience of the interaction in this specific space that affects the socially constructed self who travels between specifically bounded spatio-temporal coordinates; this is the core of the volunteer tourist's experience. Therefore, the alternative tourist as a wanderer seeking simply to repudiate established tourism experiences (Cohen, 1995: 13) is critiqued as still failing to incorporate or recognize elements that may provide for an understanding of the experience.

Ecotourism Operators, Communities and Volunteer Tourism

Many, but not all, volunteer tourism operations find their roots in ecotourism. As a result, it is important to recognize the relationship with ecotourism and volunteer tourism. The ecotourism literature has a tendency to focus on cases in marginal or environmentally threatened areas. These communities often recognize the connection between economic survival and the preservation of their natural resources through ecotourism development. One of the ways this can be achieved is by finding assistance through organizations that offer volunteer programmes to work on such projects.

Significantly, it could be claimed that ecotourism – and in many cases volunteer tourism – is actually mass tourism in its early pretourism development

stage (Wearing *et al.*, 2005). However, it is not essential to have a singular view of what occurs. If the criteria used to describe the various components of ecotourism are applied to each particular tourism situation, it becomes clearer that a range of views of the type of tourist activity being undertaken can be taken and at the other end these activities may also conform to what Wallace (1992: 7) describes as 'real' ecotourism. More essential to this is the understanding of the two-way interactive process between host and guest, and this suggests that the social organization and culture of the host community are as much at risk from tourism as the physical environment (Robinson & Boniface, 1999). Both volunteer tourism and ecotourism aim to sustain the well-being of the host community. Volunteer tourism can be viewed as a sustainable development strategy that strives to be beneficial for the environment, local residents and the visitor, and both ecotourism and volunteer tourism then can be viewed across a spectrum that might place them as mass tourism or at the other end of the spectrum alternative tourism.

One of the key questions this book will address is: can a philosophy and practice of volunteer tourism exist outside the market priorities defined and sustained in the global market place of tourism? The global commodification or commercial globalization of ecotourism, for example, is almost complete in many international tourist markets. As Campbell (1983) observes, consumption can become an end in itself. This commodification can be seen in the ambiguity over definition as to what ecotourism is and, as such, the profit objective has perhaps led to ecotourism's misinterpretation by the industry and to the inclusion of a range of unethical products. R.W. Butler (1990) believes that for this reason a general understanding must be arrived at so that ecotourism is not just purely defined by commercial activity but also by ethics and a coherent philosophy. Some form of volunteer tourism may be able to offer an iteration of ecotourism where profit objects are secondary to a more altruistic desire to travel to assist communities.

It is hoped that the developing networks between volunteer tourists, sustainably driven ecotourism operators and local communities, ideally aligned with national conservation/development strategies, can serve as examples for the tourism industry to become more sensitized to the role of tourism in the local-global nexus. It has been suggested that ecotourism can only operate effectively if it is developed and interlinked with certain concepts, such as national conservation strategies, designed to demonstrate to sectoral interests how they interrelate (Figgis & Bushell, 2007). This thereby reveals new opportunities for conservation and development to work together (Ohl-Schacherer *et al.*, 2008). These different sectors include governments, private enterprise, local communities and organizations, conservation non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international institutions.

If each sector has an understanding of where volunteer tourism fits within the broader framework of the tourism and conservation sectors, then there is a greater likelihood of well-designed volunteer programmes. For example, a well-designed ecotourism-led volunteer tourism programme could focus on community-value driven volunteering in protected areas while providing education for outsiders

(Kutay, 1990: 38). The ecotourism organizations and their approaches therefore are an essential part of the volunteer experience.

By their very nature, ecotourism and volunteer tourism operate optimally within these parameters:

- infrastructure that is sensitively developed where the tourism industry accepts integrated planning and regulation;
- supply-led marketing by the tourism industry;
- the establishment of carrying capacities (environmental and cultural) and strict monitoring of these; and
- the environmentally sensitive behaviour and operations of tourists and operators.

While ecotourism organizations have been the focus of this discussion thus far, a wide range of institutions and organizations play an important role in providing volunteer tourism experiences. The types of organizations vary considerably; a number provide international support and sponsorship for the implementation of research projects and community development. These organizations facilitate this process through provision of necessary resources that may not otherwise be available. The international scope of these organizations can prove invaluable assistance in terms of their accumulated knowledge and experience. These types of organizations provide a large number of recruits through volunteer tourism with the discretionary time and money to spend on sustainable development efforts (Whelan, 1991; McGehee & Santos, 2005). As such, they need access to relevant educational information before, during and after their experience. This will ensure maximization of their experience both on site and back in their own community.

A number of authors suggest there is clear evidence that highly commodified tourism is leading to unacceptable impacts on social and cultural values in some developing countries (Butler, 1992; Lea, 1993; Brohman, 1996; Robinson & Boniface, 1999; Cloke & Perkins, 2002; Archer *et al.*, 2005; Wearing *et al.*, 2005; Jamal *et al.*, 2006; Holden, 2008; Kabwe-Segatti, 2009). Mass tourism is part of the free market economy, whereas volunteer tourism has roots in the decommodified spaces of community and environment. As a result, volunteer tourism often operates outside the traditional channels of mass tourism. Tourism in the free market economy uses and exploits communities and natural resources as a means of profit accumulation and has been described as the commercialization of the human need to travel. This can lead to the exploitation of host communities, their culture and environment (Lea, 1993: 714). A further concern over the impact of tourism on local culture is that organizations operating under the banner of ecotourism and volunteer tourism may need to accept regulations to protect natural environments from the exploitative attitudes of the free market society.

It is conceivable that if volunteer tourism became dominated by the market economy, creating barriers between the volunteer tourist and the destination areas, then it would simply become another of a litany of commercially driven choices – and its purpose or significance becomes benign. This book seeks to address the idea that volunteer tourism enables the individual to have an

experience that incorporates social value into identity and hence links the host community, the environment and self. If the key to a volunteer tourist experience is appreciation and awareness of the local environment (cultural and social), then the danger is that the volunteer tourist just becomes another consumer of a market product and thus eliminates or 'filters out' the underlying volunteer–community link in the experience.

Volunteer tourism experiences can be examined differently from other tourism experiences, particularly in terms of the notion of self. Some argue that volunteer experiences cause value and consciousness changes in the individual that will subsequently influence their concept of self, and may even predicate a change in identity, (e.g. Wearing, 2002; Lepp, 2008). However, McDonald *et al.* (2009) argue that the pursuit of a desired identity is often derailed through the promulgation in modern Western societies of an ideal consumer whose primary leisure activity is consumption. As a result, this commodified volunteer tourist can never achieve what they seek. The experience becomes a tranquilizer rather than an awareness raising experience. The individual is left with an unsatisfactory search for some form of identity and an endless need to follow the latest dictates of big business and tourist markets. Local destination communities are consumed under the guise of a legitimate altruistic activity rather than leading to awareness and appreciation of culture, nature and discovery of the travel–self link. This commodified version of volunteer tourism therefore does not legitimize the rights of the host community as an entity with its own history and sense of place, but rather provides another source of consumption that will actually endanger the very communities and environments the volunteer tourist seeks to protect. Further, the volunteer tourists themselves are complicit in this consumption and commodifying process and are then the economic 'units' targeted by the industry.

The Growth in Volunteer Tourism

Volunteer tourism is a rapidly growing phenomenon (Bakker & Lamoureux, 2008; Tourism Research and Marketing, 2008). A survey of over 300 volunteer tourism agencies worldwide indicated the market has grown to a total of 1.6 million volunteer tourists a year, with a value of £832 million–1.3 billion (US\$1.7–2.6 billion) (Tourism Research and Marketing, 2008). However, accurately estimating volunteer tourism activity is difficult due to the diversity in volunteer and travel activities. According to Tourism Research and Marketing (2008: 5), volunteer tourism involves a combination of travel and voluntary (unpaid) work. At present, the majority of agencies providing volunteer tourism products are not-for-profit; however, there has been a steady increase in the number of commercial ventures now entering the market. Their activities (volunteer tourism agencies) have a considerable impact on the countries served, not only in terms of the fees paid directly to them by participants, but also because the volunteer travellers spend much larger sums of money funding their total travel plans – an average of over US\$3000 a trip in 2007 (Tourism Research and Marketing, 2008: 5).

Other findings from the Tourism Research and Marketing (2008) report into volunteer tourism include:

- Volunteer tourists are more likely to be women than men.
- Seventy per cent of volunteer tourists are aged between 20 and 25.
- Motivations for volunteer travel include a mixture of volunteering, exploring other cultures, and working and studying abroad.
- Many volunteer tourists source their own placements once they arrive at their destination.
- Ninety per cent of volunteer tourists travel to Latin America, Africa or Asia.

Volunteer tourism encompasses a range of types including international gap-year travel, international volunteer development work, environmental project volunteering and travel that includes both tourism and volunteering. International gap-year travel has emerged as a significant player in global youth tourism in recent years. A 'gap-year' is defined as a nominal period during which a person delays further education or employment in order to travel (Millington, 2005). Although this interlude may be experienced at any point across the lifespan, it is within the period of late adolescence and early adulthood that the gap-year experience has become most popular. In Australia, the gap-year concept has only recently developed traction. Products designed for what has been evocatively branded by one major commercial travel service provider as the 'Big Year Out' are beginning to feature in commercial travel service providers' promotional materials targeting young Australians.

In the UK, the international 'gap travel' sector is much more mature, having grown to become a significant element of outbound tourism, which is supported by an industry of commercial and NGO provider organizations (Simpson, 2004). In 2005, the gap-year in the UK was valued at £5 billion per annum with predictions that it will rise to £20 billion by 2015 (Ward, 2007).

Gap-year travel describes a wide array of activities. Some of these are considered hedonistic (Simpson, 2004), such as the popular and sometimes infamous budget coach-touring through Europe. Other forms of gap-year travel such as longer-term independent travel have also been criticized as a form of dropping out and escape (West, 2005). In recent years, there has been growing interest among young people in gap-year volunteer tourism. Gap-year volunteer tourists are those who use their gap-year to volunteer on a wide range of projects, particularly in the area of community development.

Volunteer Tourism and Pro-poor Tourism

The worldwide interest and growth in volunteer tourism over the last 20 years has also proved to be fertile ground for the phenomenon of PPT (Hall, 2007; Meyer, 2007; Goodwin, 2008; Harrison, 2008; Suntikul *et al.*, 2009; Theerapapissit, 2009). While conceptually volunteer tourism and PPT are often seen as discrete elements of the tourism sector, in practice each overlap and interact in various ways.

Sustainable tourism researchers and practitioners often argue that tourism, if conducted sustainably, has the potential to reduce poverty in developing countries (Suntikul *et al.*, 2009). However, it has only been since the early 1990s that a specific response to this goal has taken shape in the form of PPT. The principle of PPT is the following:

Tourism that generates net profits for the poor . . . (it) is not a specific product or sector of tourism, but an approach to the industry . . . PPT strategies aim to unlock opportunities for the poor – whether for economic gain, other livelihood benefits, or participation in decision making.

(Ashley *et al.*, 2000: 2)

In many ways, PPT overlaps with ecotourism and sustainable tourism more generally in its approach to provide sustainable development for local communities so that they might achieve a higher standard of living. The difference between PPT and other forms of tourism such as volunteer and ecotourism is that PPT focuses on countries in the less developed South. 'Poverty is the core focus, rather than one element of (mainly environmental) sustainability' (Ashley *et al.*, 2001: viii).

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has become committed to exploring ways in which tourism can contribute to the well-being of poor communities and their environment. 'The World Tourism Organization is convinced that the power of tourism – one of the most dynamic economic activities of our time – can be more effectively harnessed to address problems of poverty more directly' (UNWTO, 2012: 1). Using tourism as a tool to reduce poverty makes sense given that international tourism makes important contributions to the economies of developing countries, particularly to foreign exchange earnings, employment and Gross Domestic Product (Roe & Urquhart, 2001: 3). The focus of PPT is generally economic benefits. Therefore, strategies attempt to achieve outcomes with this goal and include expanding business and employment opportunities for the poor, enhancing collective benefits, capacity building, training and empowerment (Roe & Urquhart, 2001: 5–6).

An important aspect of the success of PPT projects is volunteers, generally from developed countries. An exemplary organization that provides opportunities for volunteering and development in disadvantaged communities is Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), which is an international development charity that works through volunteers. The majority of volunteers are skilled professionals with an average age of 41. Volunteers work on a range of projects with the aim of imparting their knowledge and skills to locals. Placements are typically 2 years, with some projects in communities being up to 12 months long (Voluntary Service Overseas, 2012).

Book Outline

Chapter 2 examines alternative tourism experiences and how tourists themselves construct them, then contextualizes the concept of volunteer tourism within those boundaries of alternative tourism as well as mass tourism. In

exploring alternative tourism experiences within the context of wider discussions about culture and society, it is proposed that alternative tourism experiences can best be clarified by the particularity of the specific tourist experience.

Chapter 3 focuses on community development in volunteer tourism destinations. Ideally, volunteer tourism programmes and projects are developed in a way that places the community at the centre of the discussion. While many organizations wholeheartedly agree with and work to implement this perspective, they sometimes struggle with the operationalization of the concept. Fortunately, there are several practical community-based tourism development models available that can address this problem. These include the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) approach, the Tourism Optimization Management Model (TOMM), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Each brings a viable framework to the community development table that can assist with the inclusion of volunteer tourism in the alternative tourism mix. Chapter 3 explains each of these models in detail and provides examples of their value to volunteer tourism development.

Chapter 4 discusses the importance of the volunteer tourism organization as a vital component of the three-legged stool of the host community, the volunteer tourist and the volunteer tourism organization. After initially laying the groundwork that includes a review of the research in this area, the author targets several exemplary organizations, including CVA, MIUSA and YCI. The chapter concludes with a list of other exemplary volunteer tourism organizations.

Chapter 5 is written by Simone Grabowski and explores the motivations and perspectives of the volunteer tourist. This includes a review of the work in mainstream tourism motivations, with particular attention paid to the theoretical perspectives that have been at the centre of the discussion for decades. This is followed by a more specific discussion that targets the unique motivations of volunteer tourists, which includes the altruism versus self-development debate, the role of adventure/discovery, social interaction, learning and timing. The chapter concludes that there is not one single motivation that is more common among volunteer tourists than the others, and in fact the core motivation will vary depending on a person's values, personality and life stage. Although a number of empirical studies have been cited, current research is still limited, and a clear picture has yet to emerge on whether the motives of volunteer tourists differ according to demographics or some other independent variable.

Chapter 6 is organized into two primary sections. This first introduces the reader to a potential mechanism that can improve the way projects are established and evaluated with local communities: The 2008 Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC). These guidelines brought together over 40 of the world's leading public, private, non-profit and academic institutions in a broad-based stakeholder consultation process. The GSTC focus on: maximizing social and economic benefits to local communities; reducing negative impacts on cultural heritage; reducing harm to local environments; and planning for sustainability. Standards such as these can bring about less market-based and more genuine local community projects and volunteer tourism experiences grounded in the cultures and daily lives of local communities. The second section presents research on three volunteer tourism programmes, including the Taita Discovery

Centre in Kenya (by Andrew Lepp), the Gibbon Rehabilitation Project, Phuket, Thailand (by Sue Broad & John Jenkins), and a collection of study tours to Cuba including Global Exchange Reality Tours and Oxfam (by Rochelle Spencer).

Chapter 7, written by Matthew McDonald and John Wilson, presents an existential perspective to volunteer tourism. McDonald and Wilson begin with background on the history, research and paradigm of existentialism. They then tackle the notion of authenticity and the role of volunteer tourism in creating an authentic experience. They claim that volunteer tourism differs from other forms of tourism in that it offers much greater opportunities to negotiate the fundamental conditions of existence, and therefore modes of authenticity. In most forms of tourism, the tourist is chaperoned and protected in the countries, regions and cities they seek to travel through (Olsen, 2002). In contrast, volunteer tourism ideally dissolves the barriers that exist between tourists, locals, culture and the environment. By its very nature it fosters intimacy and closeness when volunteers find themselves working and living alongside their hosts; it affords a degree of mutual exchange and interaction that is uncommon in other forms of tourism (Zahra & McIntosh, 2007).

Chapter 8 closely examines the extremely elusive concept of cross-cultural relations between hosts and guests, both in terms of mainstream and volunteer tourism. Issues of tourist privilege over host communities, the notion of 'Othering' at both the individual and community level, and methods of resistance implemented by the host community are all addressed. The chapter concludes with research-based recommendations to encourage rich and rewarding cross-cultural experiences for both the volunteer tourist and the local community.

Chapter 9 looks ahead to the potential futures of volunteer tourism. In particular, the economic form, motivations, and planning and policy of volunteer tourism in the future are the focus of this chapter. Volunteer tourism is, in many ways, standing at a crossroads. Will it succumb, like many other forms of tourism, to commodification, or will it resist and become an example of an enlightened, decommmodified experience? Next, will the altruism versus self-development debate be put to rest? Finally, will the ground-breaking efforts like those of the International Ecotourism Society (TIES) Voluntourism guidelines (2012) result in a more formalized accreditation process that is accessible to a wide range of volunteer tourism providers, or will accreditation only be financially viable for a few elite volunteer tourism organizations? While these questions cannot yet be answered, they certainly need to come to the forefront of research and policy in volunteer tourism. The goal of this chapter in particular, and the book overall, is to pose these questions and encourage the dialogue to continue across and amongst researchers, volunteer tourism providers, the local communities and volunteer tourists everywhere.

Note

¹See for example Gray's Wanderlust/Sunlust Theory (Mathieson & Wall, 1982), Ross' consideration of Pull/Push determinants (1994: 21) or even Plog's (1974) analysis of allocentric and psychocentric personalities in dictating travel behaviour.